

**Paul Acker Testimony before Appropriations Committee**  
**February 22, 2013**

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Paul Acker, Co-Chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition, Coordinator of Social Rehabilitation at InterCommunity and a person in recovery.

I am here to talk about a few issues raised in the Governor's Budget that are concerning. To start, briefly in my testimony of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Budget on February 15, 2013 I brought up the annualization of the 5% rescissions, I would like to reemphasize the impact this may have on for people in need in services. Over the course of the week there was an editorial in the Journal Inquirer (Attached, "Don't Blame Society for Troubles of mentally ill") justifying discrimination against people living with a mental illness. In this article, the writer states that employers and landlords aren't "irrational and hateful" for denying access to jobs and housing. Yet, we know that people, when given the right supports can achieve great things. The annualization the Governor is proposing will shrink those supports, creating barriers to much needed voluntary, community based services. People will end up in our Emergency Rooms more frequently or in jail at a higher cost to the State. While I know fiscal times are tough, it seems a lot smarter to have our investment in quality community services to support people where they are at, than to say we'll pay a higher cost later times an unknown exponent.

I am also here to oppose the state's claiming any COLA the federal government increases their payments to those people on SSI or SSDI. Neither of these benefits help people move ahead in life. In most cases recipients live at or below the poverty level. The COLA allows people to maintain as prices for everything else rises. In effect, by taxing them this adjustment, we are further marginalizing their ability to stay afloat. I know from my experience on SSDI, the little extra money kept me from drowning.

Finally, I would like to talk about the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Committee, on which I also serve. The Governor is proposing its elimination in the implementer of his budget. I listened last week when some of the commissioners were in to testify before the committee as Representative Ritter when talking about her experience in accounting how combining accounts removes transparency. If this portion stands we will remove the transparency not just for providers, but also for consumers and families. Behavioral Health will lose the primacy and oversight of the system of care created to help people to save the state about \$50,000. We have come too far to go back now. I urge you to keep this working committee as a part of a vibrant system of care.

Thank you for your time.

## Don't blame society for troubles of mentally ill

By Chris Powell

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Mentally ill people have problems. But then so do people who have to deal with the mentally ill -- which is why the recent exhibit of photographs in the underground walkway between the state Capitol and the Legislative Office Building is so misleading.

The exhibit, sponsored by the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, aims to counter what it calls discrimination against the mentally ill. Mental illness, Commissioner Patricia Rehmer tells the Connecticut Mirror, "is the last bastion of discrimination."

But discrimination is just a matter of making choices, everyone discriminates every day, and there are different discriminations -- irrational, prejudicial, or hateful, like discrimination by race or ethnicity, and the perfectly sensible, like discrimination by *behavior and likely consequences*.

Because the school massacre in Newtown was committed by a young man who appears to have had some sort of mental illness or personality disorder, Connecticut lately has been full of testimony by people about the distressing conduct of mentally ill family members who have refused or been unable to get treatment or whose treatment has failed and who are unable to function normally, either within their families or to earn a living. Some of these mentally ill people have been described as dangerous, though on the whole the mentally ill may be no more dangerous than the supposedly sane.

So is a landlord necessarily irrational and hateful in his reluctance to rent to someone who may behave badly but claim not to be responsible for himself on account of illness, who may bother his neighbors, and who may have trouble holding a job and paying rent and still prove impossible to evict against a claim of wrongful discrimination?

And is an employer necessarily irrational and hateful in his reluctance to hire someone whose mental illness incapacitates him at certain times and may scare co-workers but who may prove impossible to dismiss against a claim of wrongful discrimination?

Or are such landlords and employers just protecting themselves against getting stuck with social costs that should fall on the government?

While mental illness indeed may be a neglected public health issue, government won't accomplish much for the mentally ill by blaming society for their bad behavior.